

MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission

DATE, TIME AND

PLACE OF MEETING: Thursday, February 27, 2002, 8:00 a.m., Room 106, County-City Building, 555 South 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS AND OTHERS

IN ATTENDANCE: **Members:** Pat O'Donnell, V.J. Nelson, Jeff Searcy, Kim Todd, Jim Hewitt, and Tom Laging

Others: Bob Ripley (Capitol Environs Staff), Lori McClurg (DAS State Building Division), Jerry Shorney (Parks & Recreation), Jeann Nelson (Builders), Polly McMullen (DLA), Lynn Jones and Matt Metcalf (Davis Design), Bob Gritmit, Greg Allen, Jim Dobler and Byron Boslau (Farmers Mutual) Wally Becker, Arlyss Felt and James Felt (Welch Limited Partnership), Patricia Snavelly (Citizen), Ed Zimmer and Missy Minner (Planning Dept.)

STATED PURPOSE

OF THE MEETING: Regular Monthly Meeting of the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission

Approval of the meeting notes of January 30, 2002 -

Meeting notes were approved 4-0; Nelson, O'Donnell, Searcy & Todd voting 'yes'; Hewitt abstaining; Kilgarin and Laging absent.

Application for certificate of appropriateness for demolition of Yolo and Metropolitan Apartments, by Davis Design on behalf of Farmers Mutual Insurance Company -

Boslau gave a brief history of Farmers Mutual Insurance company. He explained that it is committed to staying financially sound during its expansion and is in the process of looking for space for future expansion. They were approached by the Metropolitan Apartment owners about purchasing the property at 502 S 12th Street. Farmers Mutual hired Davis Design to assist them with the development of a long term plan.

Metcalf stated that the immediate plan focuses on the property relating to the Metropolitan and Yolo properties. The intention is to convert that land area into additional parking with access off the alley. The visual impact is being studied. The removal of those two buildings frees up a total view of the Capitol. They anticipate a tiered lot with landscaping screen and a buffer that would include low shrubs and street trees.

They have met with the appropriate utility companies and were told that the utilities could be moved at a cost. They are unsure of the cost at this time because of the fiber optic lines, but have heard anywhere from \$300,000 to \$1.5 million.

Becker indicated that the owners of the Metropolitan support this application. The sale of that property was precipitated by death of one of the owners. They attempted to negotiate a deal with

a non-profit organization supported by the City to convert this to low income housing. In order to do so, the structure will need to be brought up to code with plumbing and wiring. The non-profit ran the numbers and discovered that it would not be economically viable to operate the building.

There are about 6 tenants out of 56 units. Those tenants are in the process of being moved out of the building. If the Commission does not authorize the demolition of the building, an economic hardship would be put on the owners. There is no cash flow. The expense of maintenance, utilities, and insurance is tremendous. There is no parking, so the tenants are drawn from students and people without cars.

This building was placed on the historical register because it was, at one time, the tallest apartment building in the City. The owners are not aware of any significant historic event that happened here or any ties to significant people of history and suggest that the function of the building has been fulfilled.

Snaveley expressed concern about the demolition of older apartment buildings around the Capitol. She referred to an article about a marketing program being launched to encourage students to live closer to campus. She has not looked into the economics of the building, but believes that the removal of the buildings is detrimental to the flavor of the area.

Boslau stated that Farmers Mutual has no time line in terms of developing the entire campus. They would like to move forward as they are able to. This immediate project is scheduled for as soon as possible at the sellers' request. There will be a long term plan, but none exists at this time.

McMullen appeared on behalf of the Downtown Lincoln Association. DLA supports Farmers Mutual and the sellers and wanted the Commission to know that they have been communicating with Farmers Mutual and desire to have them continue to be a major presence in downtown Lincoln. They are an asset to downtown Lincoln.

With regard to the housing question that was mentioned, she added that DLA has had a goal for the last 5 or 6 years to increase downtown housing opportunities for people of all ages and income levels. They had someone independently walk through the Metropolitan building to look at its potential for housing. That feedback confirmed that it is not financially feasible.

Searcy stated that previous subcommittee conversations were positive. The Commission's concern would be future ramifications. It also would like to see Farmers Mutual stay downtown.

Zimmer indicated that the staff report does not comment on the possibility of a hardship because that request was not made in the application from Davis. It is in the ordinance to recognize an economic hardship. He suggested that if the Commission granted the certificate based on economic hardship they require specific documentation speaking to that hardship.

With no one further appearing, the public hearing was closed.

ACTION -

Todd expressed a concern with Farmers Mutual's unwillingness to present a general plan that says they are willing to stay in downtown Lincoln. She felt the Commission was not being told the entire story. The buildings do need to come down, but she would like to see a diagram saying that if Farmers Mutual needs space to expand this is where they would go. Ripley agreed that some reassurance to that degree should be given.

Hewitt understood the Commission wanting something showing their intent. However, he believed the Commission should be happy to have the property in the hands of a strong owner such as Farmers Mutual who could offer it as a whole campus if they were to move out of downtown. He believes that Farmers Mutual will stay where they are and is not troubled by them not having a particular plan. He pointed out that NEBCO started acquiring property in 1958 and didn't decide what to do with it until 1999.

Todd agreed that their amassing property is positive, but didn't feel they were being up front with the Commission. She pointed out that the sub-committee that met with Farmers Mutual requested a simple diagram that would allow the Commission to say that this is something that will fit in the district.

O'Donnell indicated that this was a no lose deal from his perspective. The enhancement of the Environs and providing of a vista for the Capitol is important. The subcommittee discussion doesn't necessarily dictate what the Commission does.

McMullen mentioned that based on discussions with Farmers Mutual at the time they hired Davis Design, they expect to complete the master planning process in about 6 months. That may or may not have changed.

O'Donnell moved suspension of the rules to take immediate action on this item, seconded by Hewitt. Motion to suspend rules passed 6-0; Nelson, Hewitt, O'Donnell, Laging, Searcy and Todd voting 'yes'; Kilgarin absent.

Todd moved approval of the removal of the buildings at 502 and 508 S 12th Street with the condition that a detailed parking plan that exceeds the City's requirements for screening, using the NEBCO parking lot as a model, be brought before the Commission prior to construction of the parking lot and that an update on the master plan be given to the Commission at that time, seconded by Nelson.

McMullen stated that Farmers Mutual has expressed a desire to have the standards being requested by the Commission. They are proud of their property. She believed that they would want a nice parking lot.

Motion for approval of the removal of the buildings at 502 and 508 S 12th Street with the condition that a detailed parking plan that exceeds the City's requirements for screening, using the NEBCO parking lot as a model, be brought before the Commission prior to construction of the parking lot and that an update on the master plan be given to the Commission at that time carried 6-0; Nelson, Hewitt, O'Donnell, Laging, Searcy and Todd voting 'yes'; Kilgarin absent.

Miscellaneous -

Laging showed the Commission the renderings of Centennial Mall being entered in the competition by ENCARB. He indicated that he will be presenting the plan to the University on March 4 and recognized that landscaping detail needs to emerge on the drawings.

Zimmer added that Pershing has expressed an interest in having some operational issues addressed but also see themselves as being key participants in producing downtown events. They offered to host a meeting of the neighbors if it is desired.

Zimmer indicated that Parks has received a pressing request from the University with regard to the maintenance of Q-R block on Centennial Mall, dealing specifically with safety issues. Shorney added that there was an attempted assault in front of the church on the R-Q block. Parks has committed to removing some of the overgrown vegetation in that area. LES is proposing temporary wooden light poles to immediately address the issue. That item will come before the Commission at its March meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:30.